



180317-N-RM689-0482 PACIFIC OCEAN (March 16, 2018) Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) transits the waters near Guam en route for Pacific Partnership 2018 (PP18). PP18's mission is to work collectively with host and partner nations to enhance regional interoperability and disaster response capabilities, increase stability and security in the region, and foster new and enduring friendships across the Indo-Pacific Region. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Kelsey L. Adams/Released)

A NAVY NURSE'S REFLECTIONS ON PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP 2018

By Lt. j.g. Natalie Spritzer

Lt. j.g. Spritzer is a Staff Nurse on an Inpatient Cardiac Care Unit at Naval Medical Center San Diego. She has served as a Staff Nurse aboard the USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) for Pacific Partnership 2018. Lt j.g. Spritzer is also board certified in Pediatric Nursing.

Selfies are sometimes considered vain or whimsical. Still, they provide glimpses into the lives of our friends, and those glimpses can be meaningful in understanding their lives. In my Pacific Partnership 2018 (PP18) deployment, selfies afforded an unexpected value – helping to strengthen relationships with our partners around the world.

In a sense, my Pacific Partnership 2018 journey began two years ago, when I first toured USNS Mercy (T-AH 19). While traversing its main spaces, I marveled at the incredible capabilities of this massive floating hospital and I felt my inspiration grow. Mercy was no longer just a photo to me. Awestruck, I was even more proud to be a member of the Navy Medicine team. The experience reaffirmed one of my top reasons for joining the Navy in the first place – to get involved with global health engagement (GHE).

Since that day, my career in the Navy has taken me all over the world, and has afforded me leadership opportunities in nursing that I never imagined possible. In just two years, I have received training in battlefield trauma, mass casualty disaster response, and small firearms marksmanship. As a Navy nurse, I am expected to be deployment-ready at all times—and I've worked in hospitals, clinics, and other unique environments to achieve this. At Naval Medical Center San Diego, I experienced pediatric care on an inpatient ward – including training in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) – as well as care of adults with severe cardiac diseases. Additionally, I have enjoyed opportunities for teaching, curriculum development, and conducting research studies with Navy nurse scientists.



BENGKULU, Indonesia (April 4, 2018) Then-Ens. Natalie Spritzer, a native of Encinitas, Calif., gives a speech about how women and children are effected by natural disasters during a women's peace and security symposium aboard Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) during the Indonesia mission stop of Pacific Partnership 2018 (PP18). (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Kelsey L. Adams/Released)

While all of these experiences were unique and valuable, I was motivated to relive the feeling I had when I first toured the Mercy, and anxious for the opportunity to dive head first into GHE. Over the past four decades, Navy Medicine has played an increasingly important role in global health. Through humanitarian assistance and disaster response missions as well as missions like Pacific Partnership, Navy Medicine has left a lasting impression with our worldwide healthcare partners.

I was thrilled to be selected for Pacific Partnership 2018 in order to see GHE firsthand, and witness the impact it can have around the world. Over four months, we visited seven countries in the Pacific. Missions in each host nation varied, although many of our missions were training focused.

I participated in training symposiums that focused on disaster response and public health. I also experienced “side-by-side” nursing exchanges where I worked in parallel with host nation nurses to provide patient care in their hospitals and clinics. Aboard Mercy itself, the surgical team operated on citizens from host nations and I provided shipboard post-operative care. During our periods at sea, we trained for activating the ship’s disaster response capabilities. In these exercises we received patients from flight operations during mass casualty simulations, with as many as 40 live patients. There was never a dull moment during Pacific Partnership 2018!

Part of GHE is embracing distinct cultures and situations while visiting each country.

During one engagement, we participated in a training symposium where I listened to lectures from Indonesian experts on disaster response. One speaker in particular described the paralysis that can strike after a natural disaster ravages the landscape. Training is critical. When my turn came to speak, I provided perspective for emergency responders who would care for vulnerable children and help reunify them with their families. Their positive responses resonated with me.



Photo courtesy of Lt. j.g. Natalie Spritzer.

USNS Mercy often serves as a symbol of hope and inspiration. During Pacific Partnership, I took several hundred selfies with host nationals. I usually don’t take a lot of selfies, but it was my way of reciprocating appreciation for their infectious enthusiasm. Looking back, I gained a collection of photos that I cherish. Although my experience of taking selfies in Indonesia stands out, our partners in all of the countries we visited positively affected me in ways I am only beginning to

understand.